

**Don't Walk in Your Sleep
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Part 2**

Last week I shared with you that there are differences between believers who are looking for the Lord's return and the people in the world who are not. This is the theme that Paul develops for us in **1 Thess. 5:1-11**. Let us once again read this passage. **“Now as to the times and the epochs brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. (2) For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. (3) While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape, (4) But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; (5) for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; (6) so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. (7) For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. (8) But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. (9) For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, (10) who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. (11) Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.”** I believe within these verses we see a number of distinctions between those who are looking for the Lord's return and those within the world who are not.

The very first difference that we saw last week was the difference between “knowledge and ignorance.” Look again at **VV. 1-2** **“Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. (2) For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.”**

Paul in **1 Thessalonians. 4:13-18** felt compelled to give the Thessalonians certain information about the dead in Christ and their participation in the future event called the rapture. He did this in order to comfort them. But in this new paragraph he is not focusing on what they do not know but rather on what they do know. And he will use what they do know to stimulate them to living holy and productive lives. What specifically did they know?

They knew that a time of judgment was going to come from the hand of God. They knew that this time of judgment from the hand of God would come upon the world unannounced just like “a thief.” This time of future judgment that they were expecting and which would come unexpectedly is called the “Day of the Lord.”

The “day of the Lord” when it is used in the O.T. Scriptures is always associated with the judgment of God either on the nation of Israel or upon the nations surrounding Israel.

The “day of the Lord” when used in the O.T. Scriptures could refer to either a near or far distant judgment of God or both. In **1 Thess 5:2** it is clearly referring to God's final cataclysmic judgment against the sinfulness of man which is spoken of frequently in the O.T.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The expression “day of the Lord” though involving other nations, exclusively concerns God’s purposes for the nation of Israel. It is this future cataclysmic judgment of God that initiates Israel’s millennial kingdom and it is this future cataclysmic judgment that culminates Israel’s millennial kingdom. The “day of the Lord” which is yet to come will extend from a period just before the millennial kingdom through the kingdom and conclude at the very end of the kingdom just prior to the new heavens and new earth.

What is a very comforting thought for us in respect to this future cataclysmic judgment of God that is coming is the fact that the church will not go through it.

The Thessalonian Christians knew some very important things concerning the “times and the epochs” which the world did not know. They knew that following the rapture of the church that the day of the Lord would come like a thief in the night and judgment would be poured out upon this world. But what other contrasts do we see in this passage?

EXPECTANCY AND SURPRISE

Obviously those who possess knowledge such as the Thessalonian church would be living their lives in light of this coming judgment. And the world would be living lives devoid of this expectancy .

Let us read **VV. 3-5** “**While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. (4) But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; (5) for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness.**

Certainly it is not the church who will be taken by surprise by the Day of the Lord. Look at **V. 3** “**While they are saying, “Peace and safety then destruction will come upon them suddenly.”** It does not say, “**While we are saying, “Peace and safety then destruction will come upon us suddenly.”** It is not the church that will be taken by surprise but rather the world. The world is taken by surprise.

Why is that? Is it because the world has not been told that the Lord will one day come in judgment. Certainly there may be many people in the world who have never been told that, but ,there are also many people in the world that have been. Certainly I am not silent about this and I would hope that you are not silent about this. It is not as if people are not being told that judgment is coming. They just choose not to believe it. This ability by the world to ignore the messengers of God is common. The world consistently believes that all is well even when God’s true messengers are warning them of judgment.

Jeremiah 6 - In Jer. 6 we have a prophecy of the invading of Judah and the besieging of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army in **VV. 1-6**. Following this prophecy was a listing of the sins of Judah and Jerusalem. And amongst those sins we read in **VV. 13-14** the following, “**For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, Everyone is greedy for gain, and from the prophet even to the priest. Everyone deals falsely.**

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

(14) And they have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ But there is no peace’. God through Jeremiah was warning Judah and Jerusalem concerning the coming judgment of God but false prophets and priests were leading the people into believing that everything would be well, and that there would be peace, but Jeremiah is telling them there will be no peace.

Jeremiah 8 - In this chapter Jeremiah magnifies and justifies the destruction that God was bringing upon Judah and Jerusalem. He represents the judgments coming as so terrible that people who die will be considered blessed by those who would continue to live in **VV. 1-3**. And then in **VV. 4-12** he emphasizes the stupidity and willfulness of Judah and Jerusalem. And in this section we read these familiar words in **VV. 10-11** **“Everyone is greedy of gain; From the prophet even to the priest. Everyone practices deceit (11) “And they heal the brokenness of the daughter of My people superficially, Saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ But there is no peace.”** These prophets and priests should have been calling Judah and Jerusalem to repentance if they truly wanted to secure a true and lasting peace. But rather than this they assured the people there would be peace without repentance.

Micah - In the book of Micah we see the capital of Israel which was Samaria and the capital of Judah which was Jerusalem brought to trial before the nations in the first three chapters. Jehovah first appears as Accuser, but soon as Judge. The nations form, as it were, a circle to see the judgment upon the two capitals. And in the midst of this we see again the problem of false prophets falsely declaring peace in the midst of imminent judgment. In **Micah 3:5** it says, **“Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets Who lead my people astray; “When they have something to bite with their teeth, They cry “peace.”** What does this mean? It meant when the rulers of the people were bribing them they would say what the rulers would want them to say. Someone might ask, well, what would they do if they did not receive handouts from their national leaders the verse went on to say, **“But against him who puts nothing in their mouths, they declare holy war.”**

It is not unusual at all that when judgment is being proclaimed by the Lord’s messengers for people to be led astray by whatever, to believe that peace and safety will prevail. This continues even to this day. We as the church have knowledge concerning the times and the epochs. We know that after we are caught up to be with Christ, that judgment, a severe judgment will come upon this earth. But even though we may be sounding the alarm, people are not listening. They continue to believe that peace and safety will prevail so rather than repenting of their sin and embracing Jesus as their Lord and Savior they continue to live as if everything is OK.

How long will this attitude persist? It will continue through today, through tomorrow, and through most of the period of time called the tribulation. How do we know this? All we have to do is to look at the verse. Then what does it say? **“While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly.”** When will this sudden destruction take place, will it take place immediately after the rapture of the church? The answer is no! The rapture of the church ushers in the period of time called the 70th week of Daniel or what is commonly referred to as the tribulation. It is a seven year period of time when God is preparing Israel for the millennial kingdom.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

When the church is raptured (1 Thess. 4:13-18) the world goes into “labor” or “birth pangs” (1 Thess. 5:3). The world will be in labor for 7 years. Look again at **V. 3 “then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child and they shall not escape.”** Paul compares the coming judgment to “**birth pangs upon a woman with child.**” Even with our modern medical skills, birth pangs are very real and very painful. The Prophet Isaiah used this same picture when he described this coming “Day of the Lord” in **Isaiah 13:6-13 “Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. (7) Therefore all hands will fall limp, And every man’s heart will melt. (8) And they will be terrified, Pains and anguish will take hold of them; They will writhe like a woman in labor, They will look at one another in astonishment, their faces aflame. (9) Behold, the day of the Lord is coming Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it.”** The early part of “the day of the Lord” when it first begins to unfold was called “**the beginning of birth pangs**” in **Mt. 24:8**. When we get to the half way point of the tribulation which will be marked by the “abomination of desolation” then hard labor begins. We see this in **Mt. 24:15-21**.

(15) “Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand) (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; (17) let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house; (18) and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak. (19) But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days! (20) But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath; (21) for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.” This seven years of tribulation or labor pains will result in the birth of the kingdom.

At the end of the tribulation Jesus will return “**with power and great glory.**” We see this in **Mt. 24:30 “and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.”** This will be followed by Christ’s judgment of the nation of Israel (**Mt. 25:1-30**) and then the Gentiles (**Mt. 25:31-46**). This will make it possible for only the righteous to enter the millennial kingdom.

As we read the O.T. we saw how the people of Israel were able to ignore the warnings of their prophets concerning the coming of judgment. They were able to carry on life pretty much as they always did. The unsaved of this world continue to do so. Still not believing that the Lord Jesus is going to come in judgment. And the apostle Paul let’s us see that even immediately prior to the coming day of the Lord prior to the millennial kingdom in the midst of the tribulation people will continue to be able to do this very thing.

But this was not true of the Thessalonian believers and hopefully it is not true of us. Let us now look at **VV. 4,5 “(4) But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should over take you like a thief; (5) for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness.”** Christians are “**sons of the light**” and therefore we are not “**in the dark**” when it comes to future events. The Thessalonian church was knowledgeable concerning “**the times and the epochs**” and so are we.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Unbelievers may ridicule the idea of Christ's return. In fact **2 Pet. 3:3-4** tells us this **“Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, (4) and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.”** Nearly 20 centuries have come and gone since our Lord gave the promise of His return, and he has not returned yet. This does not mean that God does not keep His promises. It simply means that God does not follow our calendar. In **2 Peter 3:8** it says, **“But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.**

CONCLUSION

Those who are looking for the Lord's return are different than those who are not. The first contrast that we saw was between knowledge and ignorance in **VV. 1-2**, and now in **VV. 3-5** we have seen the contrast of expectancy vs. surprise.

The world may be surprised by the coming of Christ. We will not. Hopefully we will be living in expectancy. Living expectantly does not mean putting on a white sheet and sitting atop a mountain. That is the very attitude God condemned in **Acts 1:10-11** I am sure you remember the words that were spoken to the disciples shortly after the ascension of Christ. **“And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; (11) and they also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”** If living expectantly does not mean putting on a white sheet and sitting on top of some mountain what does it mean?

It means that we live our lives in light of His return, realizing that our works will be judged and that our opportunities for service on earth will end. It means to live “with eternity's values in view.”

There is a difference between being ready to go to heaven and being ready to meet the Lord. Anyone who has sincerely trusted Christ for salvation is ready to go to heaven. Christ's sacrifice on the cross has taken care of that. Are you ready to go to heaven?

But to be ready to meet the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ is quite another matter. Scripture indicates that some believers will not be happy to see Jesus Christ! In **1 John 2:28** it says, **“And now little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.”** When Jesus comes to catch me up I don't want to shrink away from Him in shame. I hope that this is also your ambition. If it is then in light of our knowledge let us live expectantly.